

# Free Will, Evil, and Saint Anselm

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*In this lecture I concentrate on one of the questions that an adequate definition of freedom must address. The question is one with which many contemporary thinkers are currently concerned: need one have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free? This question admits of many formulations. The specific formulation which I address in this lecture is: must I genuinely be ready to take either one of two possible courses of action—to perform or not to perform a given act—in order for my taking either one of these courses of action to be free? This question is admittedly just a small part of the problem of defining freedom. Nevertheless it is a crucial part of the problem of defining freedom. It is also a part of the problem of freedom about which Saint Anselm had a great deal to say.*

*I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never simply by going on.<sup>1</sup>*

Saint Anselm has suffered a strange fate in the contemporary world. He is not just the only thinker, to my knowledge, who is known by three different names in three different parts of the world: Anselm of *Canterbury*, Anselm of *Bec*, and Anselm of *Aosta*. This is certainly strange enough in its own right. What is more strange by far is that Anselm is extolled by much of the contemporary Christian philosophical world for the brilliance of his ontological proof of the existence of God—the *Proslogion* proof—while the rest of his work is by and large ignored by much of that same world. Anselm, many seem to think, is a one proof wonder!

What I would like to do in this lecture, partly because there really is a great deal more to Anselm's thought than the first chapters of the *Proslogion*, partly out of love for the problems with which Anselm engaged, partly out of gratitude to and admiration for Anselm himself, and partly out of concern for our own time, is to pull another gem out of the Anselmian drawer, so to speak, and with it attempt to shed some light on a troublesome problem. I would like, tonight, to discuss Anselm's doctrine of freedom.

Freedom has become a considerable problem for us. This is not just because there are materialist determinists who would rather vociferously argue that it is impossible, although their doing so undoubtedly raises issues for those of us who would claim that human beings must be free.<sup>2</sup> Nor is freedom just a problem for us because our thinkers and jurists are finding it

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> William James called the determinists in question *hard determinists*. Hard determinists, as opposed to *soft determinists* or compatibilists, believe both that determinism is true—that every event is necessarily caused by prior

increasingly difficult to formulate an adequate definition of that liberty with which, determinists to the contrary, we believe ourselves self-evidently to be endowed, although this too is certainly a matter of considerable concern.<sup>3</sup> Freedom is a problem for us also because some commonly accepted conceptions of freedom are unquestionably linked to some of the more serious psychological and spiritual problems of our day.<sup>4</sup> We are, many of us, prisoners of our

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events—and that determinism is incompatible with freedom of the will. Soft determinists accept the prior claim and deny the latter one. Modern quantum physics has made hard materialist determinism rather difficult to defend. It has not, however, helped those who would defend human freedom against materialist determinism. For although quantum physics has provided for the ‘indeterminism,’ which is widely held to be that necessary requisite of free acts that determinism would deny exists, it apparently does not allow for the ‘control’ over one’s acts, which the modern definition of freedom views as essential to freedom itself. Thus, quantum physics has simply led those materialists, who would deny the claim that human beings are free, to reformulate their arguments to include the claim that material indeterminism, such as that theorized by quantum physics, is also incompatible with freedom. One such reformulation is Derk Pereboom’s *hard incompatibilism*. See, for example, Derk Pereboom, “Living without Free Will: The Case for Hard Incompatibilism,” in Robert Kane ed., Oxford/New York: *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 2005, pp. 477–488. See also such works as, Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (Clarendon Paperbacks), Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 1991; Ted Honderich, *How Free are You?: Determinism Problems*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. This is not to say that all materialists are hard determinists. The majority of them are not. See, for instance, Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 1984. Nor is it to say that all hard determinists are materialists. This too is false, although theological and cultural determinism seem to have less of a voice today than does materialist determinism.

<sup>3</sup> The plethora of literature regarding freedom, coupled with the fact that much of this literature adopts one of several contemporary definitions of freedom in order to respond to specific concerns regarding freedom raised by those who share this definition, should be ample evidence of the great trouble that contemporary thought as a whole is having with the notion of freedom. What it indicates is that the contemporary philosophical discussion of freedom is primarily composed of many parallel discussions on specific issues concerning specific understandings of freedom, but does not focus on the attempt to formulate a broadly accepted definition of freedom. This is not to say that there are no thinkers who address the broader issues. Two particularly helpful contemporary philosophical articles in this respect are: Don Locke and Harry G. Frankfurt, “Three Concepts of Free Action,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes, 49, (1975), 95–125 and Gary Watson, “Free Action and Free Will,” *Mind*, new series, 96 (1987) 145–72. See also, for example, Harry G. Frankfurt, “Concerning the Freedom and Limits of the Will,” in Harry G. Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 71–81.

For a collection of the problems that emerge from within the disparate current definitions of freedom see, e.g., Robert Kane ed., Oxford/New York: *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*; Laura Waddell Ekstrom ed., *Agency and Responsibility. Essays on the Metaphysics of Freedom*, Boulder (Co.): Westview Press, 2001; John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2007.

One helpful book with respect to the history of the political/judicial problems that have arisen with respect to freedom is Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, Cambridge (Ma): Belknap, 1998. In it, the author traces, among other things, the history of the juridical debates on freedom in the American Republic.

<sup>4</sup> This point has, I believe, become increasingly clear throughout these last two centuries. Kierkegaard, for instance, was keenly aware of it in the nineteenth century and gave an exemplary portrait of the spiritual and psychological problems that stem from inadequate concepts of freedom in the character A, the ‘author’ of the first part of *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard was surely not the only one to indicate the psychological and spiritual problems inherent in some concepts of freedom. Nietzsche was another person who was, one might claim, obsessed with these problems (see on this point, Robert Rethy, “Slaves, Masters, Tyrants: Nietzsche’s Concept of Freedom,” in Richard Velkley, ed., *Freedom and the Human Person*, Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007, pp. 229–248) as was Sartre (see for instance *L’Etre et le Néant*, and *La Nausée*). This is not to say that Kierkegaard’s analysis of these problems does not significantly differ from either Nietzsche’s or Sartre’s. It did, and radically. It is to say that all three of these men were deeply concerned with the consequences of some views of freedom. A helpful

conceptions of freedom. Freedom, thus, is a multifaceted and deep problem for us. It is a problem because there are those who would deny that we have it. It is a problem because we do not quite understand (and cannot agree upon a single definition of) what it is. It is a problem because we have come to realize that inadequate conceptions of freedom can quite frankly be dangerous.

Given the importance of a good definition of freedom, the part of the problem of freedom which I would like, with the help of Saint Anselm, to address here is precisely its definition. I would like to talk about *what freedom is*. This is, of course, a huge topic, and not just because freedom is a multifaceted and deep problem. Freedom, its possibility, and its nature, have also haunted mankind since at least the great Greek tragedians.<sup>5</sup> What haunts us inspires us to think, debate, and write. No topic has been more vigorously discussed throughout the centuries than freedom. There is most probably no topic about which more has been written. There is no philosophical topic, I believe, on which there is less agreement than the nature of freedom.

In this lecture I shall concentrate on one of the questions that an adequate definition of freedom must address. The question is one with which many contemporary thinkers are currently concerned: need one have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free? This question admits of many formulations. By asking whether or not one needs to have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free, one might be asking if moral responsibility requires that we have alternate possible courses of action.<sup>6</sup> That is, one's concern might be: can I really be held morally responsible for my actions, if I could not have done other than what I did? If I had no alternatives?<sup>7</sup> Then again, by asking whether or not one needs to have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free, one might be asking if indeterminism is really inherent in freedom. One's primary concern in this second case would be: can I be free if my actions are in some sense called for by my nature, my beliefs, my surroundings?<sup>8</sup> Once again, by asking whether or

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contemporary article which keenly addresses some of the significant problems that stem from inadequate concepts of freedom is Harry G. Frankfurt, "On the Necessity of Ideals," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, pp. 108–117.

My claim that the danger inherent in some conceptions of freedom has become increasingly clear throughout the last two centuries is not meant to suggest that it is only in the modern age that thinkers became aware of these dangers. Plato was acutely aware of them, as he most emphatically stated in his *Republic*. It seems, however, that what the ancients perceived as a possible problem has become a widespread one in the modern world.

<sup>5</sup> A most interesting analysis of the relation between fate and freedom in ancient Greek tragedies is Jean-Pierre Vernant et Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2001. The authors' thesis is that the problematic relation between *tyche* and human responsibility is the inspiration of not just the Greek tragedians, but also of the Greek philosophers.

<sup>6</sup> The contemporary debate on this issue was in large part sparked by Harry Frankfurt's article "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" *The Journal of Philosophy*, 66, No. 23, (1969), 829–839 in which the author claims that alternate possibilities are not a necessary requisite of moral responsibility. Participants in this debate include such thinkers as David Widerker, Daniel Dennett, Alfred Mele, David Robb, John Martin Fischer, Laura Waddell Ekstrom, Eleonore Stump, and Robert Kane.

<sup>7</sup> Stated otherwise, one's concern can be if the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), which on Eleonore Stumps' definitions states that "A person has free will with regard to (or is morally responsible for) doing an action A only if he could have done otherwise than A"—"Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will, *The Monist* 80 (1997), p. 591—is true.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Dennett's *Elbow Room* has sparked a debate on this point. Dennett's defense of compatibilism includes the argument based upon Martin Luther's claim "Here I stand, I can do no other." Dennett claims that Luther was

not one needs to have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free, one might be asking if indifference with respect to what one does is necessary to freedom. One's primary concern in this third case would be: must I genuinely be ready to take either one of two possible courses of action—to perform or not to perform a given act—in order for my taking either one of these courses of action to be free? These concerns are all clearly related. In this lecture, I want to concentrate on the last question.

This question is admittedly just a small part of the problem of defining freedom. Understanding whether or not we must have different possible ways in which we could act—whether or not one must genuinely be ready either to perform or not to perform a given act—in order to be free does not *per se* tell us what freedom is, why we should worry about whether or not we are free, or even why freedom is a good characteristic to have. Nevertheless our question is a crucial part of the problem of defining freedom.<sup>9</sup> This is especially true for us, who live in a

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literally right. He could at that point do no other. His action was called for by his beliefs. But was Luther's act free? Dennett claims it was. Various thinkers have responded to this claim. See, e.g., Robert Kane, "Libertarianism," pp. 13–16; Peter van Inwagen, Review of Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free will Worth Wanting*, *Noûs*, 22 (1988), 609–618.

<sup>9</sup> One of the important reasons for this, at least with respect to the contemporary world, is that the matter of alternate possibilities seems to be one of the primary features that distinguish soft determinism—or compatibilism—from both hard determinism and libertarianism. Although contemporary determinists and libertarians clearly do not agree upon whether or not human beings are free, they seem generally to share a common definition of freedom itself: i.e., they seem to agree on what needs to be true of an agent in order to claim that he is free. On it, freedom seems to have two primary characteristics: (1) it necessarily affords an agent control over his acts (the power of self-determination, or causal autonomy), and (2) it is necessarily contrary to necessity of any sort (it requires indeterminism). The first characteristic seems for most contemporary thinkers to be the crucial one. The second characteristic, on the other hand, is often viewed as a necessary requisite of the first. A being can, it is often claimed, only control his acts (have the power of self determination), if those acts are in no way necessary (if they are undetermined). The first and second characteristics, it is also often assumed, call for a free being to have different possible ways of acting: multiple possible courses of action. If freedom does indeed have both (1) and (2), then freedom can only coexist with possibility. Possibility in this case is possibility of action. But possible actions can both be and not be performed. An agent who can both perform and not perform an act has at least two possible courses of action. Thus, it is held, freedom must afford an agent at least alternate possible courses of action. Cf., e.g., Gary Watson, "Free Action and Free Will," p. 146: "Historically, I think, the main inspiration of libertarianism is an understanding of self-determination that is incompatible with determinism; roughly, determinism means determination by something other than the self, and hence heteronomy. This construal of autonomy thus dictates an indeterminist interpretation of alternative possibilities. Libertarianism can also *begin* with an interpretation of alternative possibilities that is incompatible with the kind of necessitation implied by determinists."

Given the characteristics of the contemporary determinist and libertarian definition of freedom, it is clear that compatibilists cannot accept that definition. They cannot accept the second characteristic of freedom on the libertarian/ determinist definition, i.e., that freedom is (2) necessarily contrary to necessity of any sort (it requires indeterminism). Compatibilists hold that freedom is compatible with necessity. Nor, as a result, can compatibilists really share the libertarian/determinist interpretation of the first characteristic: that freedom (1) necessarily affords an agent control over his acts (the power of self-determination, or causal autonomy). To be precise, compatibilists cannot hold that "control" requires alternate possible courses of action. This difference between determinist/libertarian and compatibilist understanding of 'control' has given rise to a significant debate on the meaning of such terms as "can," "power," "could." Cf., e.g., Bernard Berofsky, "Ifs, Cans, and Free Will: the Issues, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, 181–201.

day and age in which many would equate freedom and choice.<sup>10</sup> It also happens to be a part of the problem of freedom about which Saint Anselm had a great deal to say.

### Saint Anselm's definition of freedom

Saint Anselm had a rather peculiar view of freedom. Freedom, he believed, is akin to truth,<sup>11</sup> and like the truth consists primarily in *rectitudo*, or what one might call “proper conformity” with a right standard. Freedom, Anselm claimed, is:

the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 3).<sup>12</sup>

There is much to be said about Anselm's definition of freedom. To begin with, there seems to be something deeply right about claiming both that freedom is like truth, and that conformity to a right standard is one of the necessary requisites of something's being free, just as it is a necessary requisite of something's being true. The rightness here does not just stem from such claims as “the truth shall set you free” (Jn. 8:31–32), “he who does the truth comes to the light” (Jn. 3:20–21), and “He who does evil hates the light” (Jn. 8:44), although these claims certainly must bear weight for every Christian. They most assuredly bore extraordinary weight for Anselm, as they did for Augustine before him.<sup>13</sup> Both men cited passages like these in their works on freedom. Anselm did when he argued that freedom is *rectitudo*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> One of the classical modern philosophical formulations of this view of freedom is Descartes's. See *Mediations on First Philosophy*, (tr. Donald A. Cress) Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett: 1993, p. 38: “willing is merely a matter of being able to do or not do the same thing, that is, of being able to affirm or deny, to pursue or to shun; or better still, the will consists solely in the fact that when something is proposed to us by our intellect either to affirm or deny, to pursue or shun, we are moved in such a way that we sense that we are determined to it by no external force.” As for juridical formulations of this view of freedom, one of its most thorough formulations can be found in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*: “Matters involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under the compulsion of the State.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g., *De Libertate Arbitrii*, IV: “*T.* But when Truth itself [viz., God] says that the Devil “did not stand in the truth,” He declares that truth is also in the will. For it was only with respect to his will that the Devil was in the truth and deserted the truth. *S.* I believe this. For he deserted the truth only by sinning; and if he had always willed what he ought to have willed, then he never would have sinned. *T.* Tell me, then, what you understand truth in his will to be. *S.* It is only rightness, or uprightness [*rectitudo*]. For as long as the Devil willed what he ought to have willed—namely, the end for which he had received a will—he was in the truth and in uprightness; and when he willed what he ought not to have willed, he deserted truth and uprightness. So truth in his will can only be understood to be uprightness, since truth and uprightness in the Devil's will each consisted only in his willing what he ought to have willed. *T.* You understand well.” In this text I shall cite Jasper Hopkins's and Herbert Richardson's translation of Saint Anselm's works. Anselm of Canterbury, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*, translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Saint Anselm claims that his definition of freedom is complete: “since with respect to genus and differentiae the proposed definition is so complete that it includes neither more nor less than the freedom we are examining, nothing can conceivably need to be added to it or subtracted from it” (*De liberate arbitrii*, 13).

<sup>13</sup> Cf., e.g., *De Libero Arbitrio*, II, 37: “*Haec est libertas nostra, cum isti subdimur veritati: et ipse est Deus noster qui nos liberat a morte, id est a conditione peccati. Ipsa enim Veritas etiam homo cum hominibus loquens, ait*

The rightness of Anselm's claim that freedom is the ability to maintain *rectitudo* for the sake of *rectitudo* stems also from consideration of such things as the difference between a drug addiction and a good obsessive habit, as, for instance, playing the piano, doing research, composing music, and writing poetry can be. There is no question that a drug addiction and a good obsessive habit have similar characteristics. Both heroin and philosophical research, cocaine and composing, alcohol and playing the piano can become compulsive needs. A person who needs to do research can be as monomaniacal as a heroin addict. A composer can become as obsessed with music as an addict is with cocaine. A philosopher can become as fixated on a problem as an alcoholic is on his next drink. It is not by chance that great scientists are often portrayed as mad, extraordinary composers as irascible and unpredictable, excellent performers as self-absorbed, and legendary philosophers as living in the clouds. Research, composition, and performing are activities that can quite literally be consuming. They are as addictive as heroin. They isolate, detach, cut people off from society quite as much as heroin does. They can make people as disinterested in food, sleep, reproduction, politics, and sports, as drugs do. Not partaking in these activities can make people as miserable and frantic as is a drug addict who lacks his drugs. Research, in other words, can be as necessary to a scientist or philosopher, as music is to a composer or performer, and as drugs are to an addict. Yet, for all of the similarities between composers and drug addicts, philosophers and alcoholics, there is a radical difference between a heroin addict and a person hooked on thought. It is the difference to which Harry Frankfurt points when he claims that there is a difference between a 'wanton' and a rational agent.<sup>15</sup> It is the difference to which Susan Wolf points when she claims that freedom is the ability to act in accordance with reason, as opposed to just the ability to act autonomously.<sup>16</sup>

This difference is not easy to put in modern terms. One would be tempted to claim that it simply lies in the fact that an addiction is self-destructive, whereas a scientist's habitual obsessive need to search for an answer is self-constructive. This description certainly captures part of the difference between an addiction and a good obsessive habit. There is something wondrous about the person of Socrates—Socrates's *self*. His urgent need and exceptional ability to question, define, and clarify, his sense of humor and above all his integrity have molded and inspired millennia of thinkers. There is nothing admirable about the person of an alcoholic—an alcoholic's *self*. The world does not admire, nor is it grateful to, Dylan Thomas for having killed himself and his verse with whiskey. As true as this is, however, the claim that the difference between a drug addiction and a good obsessive habit lies in the fact that the prior is self-destructive, while the latter is self-constructive, does not suffice to capture the difference

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credentibus sibi: *Si manseritis in verbo meo, vere discipuli mei estis, et cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos. Nulla enim re fruitur anima cum libertate, nisi qua fruitur cum securitate.*" ["This is our liberty, when we are subject to the truth; and the truth is God himself, who frees us from death, that is, from the state of sin. For that truth itself, speaking as a human being to those who believe in him, says: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free". For the soul enjoys nothing with freedom unless it enjoys it with security." The translation is by Thomas Williams, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1993.]

<sup>14</sup> Cf., e.g., *De Veritate*, IV–V.

<sup>15</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* LXVIII (1971), 5–20.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

between a heroin addict and Socrates. Attractiveness aside, Socrates's monomaniacal behavior can certainly be described as extremely self-destructive. His constant need to question and understand, his pursuit of truth, must not only have made him an extremely difficult person to live with and around. It led to his execution.

What is missing from the description of the difference between a drug addiction and a good obsessive habit is reference to a person's natural end: to what constitutes a self; to what a person is meant to be. What is missing, to use Frankfurt's description, is reference to the fact that a heroin addict "is not concerned with the desirability of his desires themselves. He ignores the question of what his will is to be,"<sup>17</sup> whereas Socrates's entire life was dedicated precisely to discovering and desiring the desirable in itself, to determining the answer to the question of what his will should be, and willing it. What is missing is reference to the fact that in having pursued what is desirable in itself, what his will should be, Socrates exemplified rational agency—acting with (and in accordance with) reason—whereas by ignoring "the desirability of his desires" and the "question of what his will is to be," a drug addict exemplifies either the flight from rational agency, or the incapacity to be a rational agent. What is missing from the description is reference to the fact that rational agency is central to the constitution and life of the self, of a person. A person is, as Boethius's definition claims, an individual substance of rational nature. Socrates's monomaniacal behavior was the behavior of a person who acted as a person is meant to act. It was the behavior of a being who seeks to live in accordance with his rational nature. A drug addict's monomaniacal behavior is not. What is missing from the description of the difference between Socrates and a heroin addict is the fact that Socrates died because, and insofar as, he was a rational agent who attempted to embody what it means to be a rational agent. He died because he desired what he knew is desirable in itself, because he willed what he knew should be willed. He died, or so Plato has him claim in the *Crito*, in order to obey the eternal law. A drug addict, who dies because of his drugs, on the other hand, dies as one who has avoided attempting to will what should be willed, as one who has eluded the challenge of discovering and desiring the desirable in itself. He dies, apparently, as one for whom Socrates's eternal law has no meaning.

To put the point simply, what is missing from the description of the difference between Socrates and a heroin addict is reference to the fact that Socrates's "self-destructiveness" was not really destructiveness of the self at all. Quite the contrary, Socrates's behavior was affirmation of the fact that a person can and should live in accordance with the desirable in itself and what should be willed. It was affirmation of the fact that a person's intellectual and personal life can be coherent: that a person can truly *be* rational. Socrates's behavior was an affirmation of the self. The fact that that self-affirmation led people to destroy Socrates says nothing interesting about either Socrates's own behavior or about Socrates himself. It speaks volumes about those who killed him. As for a drug addict's self-destructiveness, on the other hand, it truly is destructiveness of the self. It is a person's negation of his own rationality, of the possibility of

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<sup>17</sup> Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 11.

acting in accordance with rationality. It is a person's negation of one of the necessary conditions of his living as his own person.

Finally, what is missing from the description of the difference between a heroin addict and Socrates is the fact that Socrates's self-affirmation, his embodying rational agency, his adhering both to the desirable in itself and to what should be willed, gave him extraordinary freedom. Socrates's monomaniacal search for truth allowed him to gain legendary mastery not only over reasoning and dialectics, but above all over himself. The ease with which he shed light on difficult problems and shaped his life to conform to those truths that he discovered is comparable to the ease with which a great pianist runs through the difficult passages of a musical score. It is an ease that allows the great pianist to achieve what is desirable in itself: making music of those difficult passages. It is an ease that gives the pianist great freedom.<sup>18</sup> This is something that a mediocre pianist, who struggles just to make it through those difficult passages, does not have in those difficult passages. It is something that someone who has never touched a piano can only dream of having with any musical passage. The great pianist's freedom is something beautiful and desirable in and of itself. So too was it with the freedom Socrates exhibited in his rationality and life.<sup>19</sup> The heroin addict knows nothing of this freedom. He refused it when he refused to be "concerned with the desirability of his desires," when he ignored the "question of what his will is to be." He refused it when he refused to heed his rationality and with it to gain the means with which to master himself. He refused it when he fled from the responsibility of being a person.

This difference between the heroin addict and Socrates should clearly play a crucial role in defining freedom. If freedom is minimally that which allows for rational agency,<sup>20</sup> and if

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. with respect to this point, Paul Benson, "Freedom and Value, *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXIV (1987), 465–486. Benson claims that acts are free to the degree to which they are "our own," and that acts which are "fully our own" "serve to express what we are like as persons, when they are potential vehicles of self-disclosure" (481).

<sup>19</sup> In his *Confessions*, Augustine gives a memorable account of what Socrates apparently lacked: a divided will, or the inability to act in accordance with one's will, of freedom: "Thus I did so many things where the will to do them was not at all the same thing as the power to do them: and I did not do what would have pleased me incomparably more to do—a thing too which I could have done as soon as I willed to, given that willing means willing *wholly*. For in that matter, the power was the same thing as the will, and the willing *was* the doing. Yet it was not done ... Why this monstrosity? And what is the root of it? The mind gives the body an order and is obeyed at once: the mind gives itself an order and is resisted. ... The mind I say commands itself to will: it would not give the command unless it willed: yet it does not do what it commands. The trouble is that it does not totally will: therefore it does not totally command... The will is commanding itself to be a will—commanding itself. Not some other. But it does not in its fullness give the command, so that what it commands is not done. For if the will were so in its fullness, it would not command itself to will, for it would already will. It is therefore not monstrosity, partly to will, partly not to will, but a sickness of the soul to be so weighted down by custom that it cannot wholly rise even with the support of truth. Thus there are two wills in us, because neither of them is entire: and what is lacking to the one is present in the other" (VIII, viii–ix). The translation is by F. J. Sheed, *Confessions*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 141–2.

<sup>20</sup> I realize that I am presupposing that freedom is indeed 'that which allows for rational agency.' I do not believe this to be a controversial claim. Not only is it supported by a great majority of great thinkers, it is a claim that seems to be shared by all those who believe that freedom is being able: (1) to do what one wants or wishes (e.g. Locke, Ayer, Van Inwagen, Clark), (2) to follow one's second-order volitions (e.g. Frankfurt), (3) to act in accordance with one's values (e.g. Watson), (4) to control one's actions (see footnote 9 above). All of these definitions of freedom



rational agency is acting with (and in accordance with) reason, then freedom must be that which allows for acting with (and in accordance with) reason. And if acting with (and in accordance with) reason is ultimately nothing but discovering and desiring the desirable in itself, determining the answer to the question of what one's will should be, and willing it, then freedom must surely be that which allows for discovering and desiring what is desirable in itself, for determining what should be willed, and willing it.<sup>21</sup> If this is so, and if desiring the desirable in itself and willing what should be willed is nothing but keeping uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself, then freedom must be *rectitudo*: "the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself." It must be the capacity to maintain proper conformity to a right standard. Being free, then, must be actually desiring the desirable in itself and willing what should be willed.

Anselm, of course, made this point more strongly. There are right objects of will, he claimed, and there are wrong ones. There are objects that are pursued and adhered to by people who are truly concerned with desiring the desirable in itself, with the "question of what their wills are to be," and there are objects that are (or can be) pursued and adhered to by those who are not so concerned. There is good, and there is evil. There is truth, and there is falsehood. The perfectly free person, the rational agent who perfectly uses his freedom, Anselm claims, perfectly pursues and adheres to the prior set of objects. He wills the good and only the good. He loves the truth and only the truth. He is unfailingly able to will what should be willed, because he unfailingly knows and loves what ought to be willed. He "so possesses what is fitting and advantageous that he cannot lose it" (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 1). He is what we would imagine a perfect Socrates would be: a hero who immediately and unfailingly does what is good and right because he knows and loves what is good and right. He is what a rational agent should be.<sup>22</sup>

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presuppose that those actions which freedom allows an agent to perform conform in some way with the agent's own reason. What else allows a person to determine what he wants, or wishes, his second-order volitions, his values? What else allows a person to control his acts?

To put the point another way, free acts are necessarily at least intentional acts. Intentional acts, by definition, are minimally those acts which have an intent—or purpose—with which they are meant to conform, or which they are intended to achieve. A purpose, in this sense, is a rational plan. Intentional acts are therefore minimally acts which are meant to conform to or to achieve an agent's rational plan. What this means, of course, is that free acts are necessarily acts which are minimally meant to conform to or to achieve an agent's rational plan. If this is so, then freedom must minimally be that which allows for those acts which are meant to conform to or to achieve an agent's rational plan, or more succinctly that freedom is that which allows for rational agency.

<sup>21</sup> *Mutatis mutandis* Frankfurt shares this point. See, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 13: "There is a very close relationship between the capacity for forming second-order volitions and another capacity that is essential to persons—one that has often been considered a distinguishing mark of the human condition. It is only because a person has volitions of the second order that he is capable both of enjoying and of lacking freedom of the will."

For an interesting analysis of Anselm's definition of free will which uses Frankfurt's distinction between first order and second order volitions see, Stan R. Tyvoll, "Anselm's Definition of Free Will: A Hierarchical Interpretation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80 (2006), pp. 155–171.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., e.g., *Cur Deus Homo*, II, 1: "We ought not to doubt that God created rational nature *just* in order for it to be happy through enjoying Him. Indeed, the reason it is rational is in order to discriminate between what is just and what is unjust, between what is good and what is evil, between what is a greater good and what is a lesser good. Otherwise [i.e., could rational nature not make these discriminations], it would be the case that it was created rational in vain. But God did not create it rational in vain. Therefore, there is no doubt that it was created rational for

There is nothing more free than he, because “nothing is more free than an upright will, from which no alien force can remove its uprightness” (*De Libertate Arbitrii* 9).

Those who are not perfectly free, Anselm claims on the other hand, can pursue the latter sorts of objects. They can will evil. They can adhere to falsehood. They are able both not to will what should be willed and to will what should not be willed. They are able both not to desire what is desirable in itself and to desire what is not desirable in itself. They can use their freedom imperfectly. Consequently, they “can be induced to what is unfitting and disadvantageous.” They are not perfectly what a rational agent should be. This is, Anselm claims, why:

the will which is not able to turn away from the uprightness of not sinning is more free than the will which is able to desert uprightness (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 1).

As for those who have actually willed what they should not will and desired what is not desirable in itself, those, that is, who have misused their freedom, they are not truly free at all. To be sure, they have wills, which they could use in order to will what is upright for the sake of what is upright, and in this sense can be said to be free.<sup>23</sup> But they cannot pursue and adhere to what they would desire, if they had not ignored the desirability of their desires. They cannot pursue and adhere to what they would will, if they had been concerned with what their wills should be. They are like Tantalus, who could not actually eat or drink although he had a mouth and hands. They cannot actually will the good, although they have wills. Like drug addicts in the throes of their addiction, those who have willed what they should not will “are able to cause themselves no longer to be able to” will uprightness of will for the sake of this uprightness itself (*De Libertate*

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the foregoing purpose. Similar reasoning proves that rational nature received the ability to make these discriminations in order that it would hate and shun evil, and love and choose good, and more greatly love and choose a greater good [than love and choose a lesser good]. For otherwise, it would be the case that God bestowed in vain upon rational nature this ability-to-discriminate, because rational nature would discriminate in vain if it did not love and shun in accordance with its discrimination. But for God to have bestowed in vain such a great capability would not be fitting. Thus, it is certain that rational nature was created for the purpose of loving and choosing the Supreme Good above all other things—loving and choosing it for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf., e.g., *De Libertate Arbitrii*, 12: “you are asking the following question: Why when a man *does not* have uprightness he is said to be free (on the ground that when he *does* have uprightness it cannot be taken away from him by someone else) rather than when he *does* have uprightness, being said to be a servant (on the ground that when he *does not* have uprightness he cannot recover it by himself)? It is as if you were asking: Why when the sun is absent is a man said to have the ability to see the sun (because of the fact that he is able to see the sun when it is present) rather than being said, when the sun is present, to have an inability to see the sun (because of the fact that when the sun is absent he is unable to make it be present)? For even when the sun is absent we have in us sight, by which to see the sun when it is present; similarly, even when uprightness-of-will is lacking to us, we have in us the ability to understand and to will, by which ability we are able to keep uprightness for its own sake when we have it. Now, when we lack nothing for seeing the sun except the sun's presence, only then do we lack the capability which its presence produces in us. Similarly, only when we lack uprightness do we have the incapability which its absence produces in us. Therefore, a man always has freedom of choice; but he is not always a servant of sin. [He is a servant of sin only] when he does not have an upright will.”

*Arbitrii*, 2). They are powerless. They cannot obtain what is “fitting and advantageous.”<sup>24</sup> And whatever has an impotent will cannot actually be free.

### Saint Anselm’s objectors

As right as Anselm’s definition of freedom would seem to be, it is a definition to which many contemporary thinkers would take objection. There are a number of significant reasons for this. The primary ones, at least with respect to our topic, are, it would seem, two. The first is that Anselm’s definition would exclude what many contemporary philosophers—and jurists—consider not just a necessary characteristic of freedom, but one of its essential characteristics: that it affords an agent at least alternate possible courses of action—or, to be clear, minimally makes him equally and indifferently able to perform or not to perform any given act.<sup>25</sup> The second objection is that Anselm’s definition would conflate freedom and morality.

If freedom really were *rectitudo*, the capacity to maintain proper conformity with a right standard for the sake of that standard, those who might raise the first objection could argue—that is, if it really were “the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself”—and if, as Anselm himself held,<sup>26</sup> there is a single standard with which a will should conform, then freedom would be the power to perform a specific and determinate act (or set of acts). It would be the ability always and in every case to keep to a single course of action. It would be the capacity to do what is upright, where there is only one standard for being upright. But, these critics would claim, it is transparently absurd to claim that freedom is by definition the power to keep to a single course of action, to perform a specific and determinate act (or set of acts): to do what is upright. Whatever freedom is, they would argue, it can in no way bind or limit an agent to any course of action, as morally upright as that course may be. If it did, freedom would be nothing but a form of necessity. An agent’s freedom would in this case make him necessarily act in a specific and determinate way. Freedom would be monomaniacal behavior. But freedom cannot be a form of necessity. It cannot make a person necessarily act in any determinate way. It is not by chance, these critics might claim, that monomaniacal behavior is called obsessive and *compulsive*. Compulsive action is action that is governed by necessity of

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<sup>24</sup> Cf., *De concordia*, III, iii: “I maintain that the will is not able to will any uprightness unless it has the uprightness by which to will uprightness. Let us now consider whether someone who does not have uprightness-of-will can in some way have it from himself. Surely, he could have it from himself only by willing it or without willing it. But, indeed, it is not the case that by willing it someone is able to obtain it by his own efforts, because he is able to will it only if he has it. On the other hand, no one’s mind accepts the view that someone who does not have uprightness-of-will can acquire it by himself without willing it. Therefore, a creature can in no way have uprightness from himself.”

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Gary Watson, “Free Action and Free Will,” 145: “two different features of freedom that must be captured in any reasonable conception—namely, self-determination (or autonomy) and the availability of alternative possibilities. Any adequate notion of free agency must provide for possibility and autonomy in *some* sense, and, in my view, the traditional conceptions that are still taken seriously were meant to do so;” Peter van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,” *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975), 89: “It seems to be generally agreed that the concept of free will should be understood in terms of the *power* or *ability* of agents to act otherwise than in fact they do. To deny that men have free will is to assert that what a man does *do* and what he *can* do coincide.”

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., *De Veritate*, chapters 4 and 12.

sorts. Compulsion is not freedom. Whatever freedom is, they would affirm, it cannot involve necessity of any real sort.<sup>27</sup> Freedom, by definition, is antithetical to necessity. Freedom, these critics would conclude as such, cannot be *rectitudo*. It cannot be “the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself.” What is rather the case, they would continue, is that since freedom is necessarily antithetical to necessity, it must *expand* an agent’s possible courses of action as opposed to *restricting* them.<sup>28</sup> Freedom must, in other words, give an agent different possible courses of action, as opposed to limiting an agent to a single course of action. This is why Ockham defined freedom as:

that power whereby I can do diverse things indifferently and contingently, such that I can cause, or not cause, the same effect, when all conditions other than this power are the same;<sup>29</sup>

and Locke claimed that it undeniably “consists in a power to do, or not to do; to do or forbear doing, as we will.”<sup>30</sup> Freedom must give those who have it alternatives. It must make any intentional act optional.

To put the matter in a different way, those who raise this first objection might argue that as that specific absence of necessity that allows for self-determination (or autonomy), freedom must by definition be—or include—the power of choice.<sup>31</sup> It is only if I have choice, those who might raise this objection could claim, that I truly control my acts. And control—self-determination, or autonomy—is at the heart of freedom. I am free precisely because I can control my acts, and control requires choice. Choice, they might add then, is incompatible with an agent’s having a determinate course of action: a single possible course of action which that agent knows to be such. An agent cannot choose to perform a given act, if he takes what he knows to be the only course of action open to him. Choice, true choice that is, must at a minimum involve alternatives: two possible courses of action, both which are known by and open to an agent.

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<sup>27</sup> What I mean by necessity of a real sort, is necessity of a non-logical sort. Freedom does involve logical necessity of sorts. Freedom necessarily binds a person to act in a way that is logically consistent with freedom itself. It necessarily makes a person’s actions have those properties that a free act must have in order to be free.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Gary Watson, “Free Agency,” *Journal of Philosophy* LXXII (1975), 205: “According to one familiar conception of freedom, a person is free to the extent that he is able to do or get what he wants. To circumscribe a person’s freedom is to contract the range of things that he is able to do. I think that, suitably qualified, this account is correct, and that the chief and most interesting uses of the word ‘free’ can be explicated in its terms.”

<sup>29</sup> *Quodlibet* I, q. 16, p. 87 in J.C. Wey, *Quodlibeta Septem in Gullielmi de Ockham Opera Theologica*, ix (New York, St. Bonaventure Press, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I, 2, xxi, sec. 57. See also, e.g., David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon, 1955, p. 104 : “By liberty, then, we can mean only a power of acting or not acting according to determinations of the will; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner and in chains.”

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Randolph Clark, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 3: “Following many other writers on a basic characterization of this freedom, I shall say that when an agent acts freely (or with free will), she is able to do other than what she does then. In such a case, the agent has a choice about what she does: it is up to her. ... Acting freely, then, requires the openness of alternatives, as well as an exercise of active control by the agent.”

Choice, in other words, is not compliance, adherence, or submission, although all three of these acts can be objects of choice. Compliance, adherence, and submission—or whatever else one wants to call taking what one knows to be the only possible course of action—do not at a minimum require that an agent have alternate possible courses of action. They do not require that an agent have an *indeterminate* course of action. One can easily comply with, adhere to, or submit to a determinate course of action: the only possible course of action. I can *adhere* to—or *comply* with—wearing no shoes, if I do not have a pair of shoes and have no means with which to obtain them. I can *submit* to an irresistible wind that blows me off my feet. It makes no sense, however, to claim that I *choose* to wear no shoes, if I have no shoes and no means with which to obtain them. Again, it makes no sense to claim that I *choose* to be blown off my feet by an irresistible wind. One cannot choose a course of action when one only has one possible course of action, and knows that one only has that course of action. If this is so, those who raise this first objection might then claim, then freedom cannot be *rectitudo*. “The ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself,” where uprightness is a determinate course of action (a single possible course of action which an agent knows to be such), is not and does not include the possibility of choice. To be sure, *rectitudo* is compatible with such acts as compliance, adherence, or submission. I can surely comply with the upright, just as I can adhere to it, and submit to it. But compliance, adherence, and submission are not choice, and freedom, that specific absence of necessity that allows for self-determination, must by definition include the power of choice.<sup>32</sup>

The second significant objection to Saint Anselm’s definition, which one could imagine Kant raising on the other hand, is that it would confuse freedom and morality. To be precise, the definition seems unwarrantedly to conflate two essential, but distinct characteristics of moral acts:<sup>33</sup> the facts that (1) they originate (and not by necessity) in a rational agent who has control over his acts, and that (2) they conform with what is morally good or right—the principles of morality. The first characteristic, which Kant called ‘spontaneity,’ is the one that we commonly associate with freedom. The second establishes the moral value of an intentional act. Both of these characteristics, the Kantian critic would admit, qualify moral acts. They must, he would add however, also be distinct characteristics of these acts. For if an act’s (1) originating (and not by necessity) in a rational agent who has control over his acts were nothing but its (2) conforming with what is morally good or right—or if an act’s being (1) were necessarily to entail

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<sup>32</sup> The point here is more complex. The heart of the objection at hand concerns what Robert Kane calls a condition for *ultimate responsibility*. If freedom does indeed involve control over one’s acts, and control concerns not just the fact that we act—that we be the sources of our actions—but how we act—what we do, how we do it, and so forth—then, Kane argues, we cannot ultimately control our acts if we are not both the “ultimate sources of our actions” and “the ultimate sources of our wills (to perform these actions).” This latter condition entails, he believes, that we be the ultimate sources of our purposes, ends, or goals. See, e.g., “Libertarianism,” in *Four Views*, p. 22: “If the second requirement were not added, we might have a world in which all the will-setting was done by someone or something other than the agents themselves... Agents in such a world might be unhindered in the pursuit of their purposes or ends, but it would never be ‘up to them’ what *purposes* or ends they pursued. To have free will therefore is to be the ultimate designer of one’s own purposes or ends or goals.” One can easily add *standards* to Kane’s list.

<sup>33</sup> By ‘moral acts’ here are meant not any acts which have a moral value, be that value negative or positive: that is, that class of acts which is to be distinguished from a-moral acts. What are meant are those intentional acts which conform with moral standards.

that it is also (2)—then no act of any rational agent could not conform with what is morally good or right. But it is absurd to claim that none of any rational agents' acts can be evil or immoral. Rational agents perform evil and immoral acts quite frequently. Genocides, murders, torture, betrayals, rape, thefts seem to be common occurrences. (1) Originating (and not by necessity) in a rational agent who has control over his acts and (2) conforming with what is morality good or right cannot therefore be identical features of moral acts. They would also seem to be independent features of moral acts, since an act's (1) originating (and not by necessity) in a rational agent who has control over his acts cannot necessarily ensure that it will (2) conform with what is morally good or right—the principles of morality. (1) and (2), the Kantian critic would consequently claim, must be distinct characteristics of moral acts.<sup>34</sup> The problem with Saint Anselm's definition of freedom, he would then point out, is that it fails to differentiate between these two distinct characteristics of moral acts.<sup>35</sup> It would claim that freedom is nothing but *rectitudo*, “the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for the sake of this uprightness itself.” As a result, the Kantian would conclude, Saint Anselm's definition is deeply flawed.

### Freedom and uprightness

Both of these objections to Saint Anselm's definition of freedom are powerful. What they would indicate is that as admirable and noble as “keeping uprightness for the sake of uprightness” and even “uprightness” itself are, they can have no part in a definition of freedom. They would indicate that the attempt itself to include “keeping uprightness” in a definition of freedom is both contradictory and absurd. They would indicate that as heroic as the dying Socrates is, he is not the proper model of freedom.

This is something that we would all apparently know by experience. We are responsible for our actions, or so it would seem, because—and to the degree to which—they are in our power. And what we mean by “actions being in our power” is not just that we are the source of our actions, although we certainly mean this. We also mean that we are no way compelled to perform them. We mean that we control our acts. I am not responsible for my migraines when I have them, although I am certainly their source. Migraines, although they are caused by my own body, are not truly “in my power.” I have no direct control over them. I cannot cause them not to exist once I have them. I am compelled to suffer them. I can certainly take measures to alleviate that suffering. But taking measures to alleviate suffering from a migraine is not making that migraine go away. It is finding a way of dealing with the unavoidable. Thus, although I can be—and am—responsible for alleviating the pain of a migraine, I am not really responsible for my migraines themselves. I am, on the other hand, responsible—and can take credit—for stringing

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<sup>34</sup> I am drawing this argument from Kant's distinction between the subjective and objective necessity of the law in the *Grundlegung*. See *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* (tr. James W. Ellington), Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1993, pp. 23–4. Kant's object in this passage is to determine the relation between the will and the moral law for two different types of will: one which is infallibly directed by an infallible rational determination of the good, and one which is not infallibly directed by an infallible rational determination of the good.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Brower raises a related critique to Anselm's identifying rightness and truth. See “Anselm on Ethics,” in ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 236.

these present words together. These present words are appearing on this page both because I am the source of this string of words, and because I can control the string and its appearing on this page. I can cease to string words together at any time. I can stop typing at any time. This string of words is “in my power.” The point here is, I believe, best articulated by Aquinas who claims that we are responsible for our acts because and to the degree to which we are “masters of our acts:”<sup>36</sup> of their taking place or of their not taking place, of their being or of their not being.

Our experience tells us that we are also responsible for the value of our acts, and for the very same reason. We are “masters of our acts.” As masters, we know not only that we have power over the existence of our acts: over the fact that the acts are performed. We also have power over how they exist: over the kind of acts they are, and how we perform them. As the mistress of this present string of words, I know not only that I control the fact that the string continues to grow. I know also that I am typing this string because I want to do so, and because I am in control of what I want to do. I could certainly play the piano or read a novel instead of typing. Both of these latter acts are unquestionably enjoyable. But I do not presently want to play the piano, as much as I like doing so. Nor do I want to read. I want to write. And I want to write not because someone has told me that I must do so. Nor do I want to write for fear of the repercussions of my not writing. I want to write because I have something that I need to say. I have analyzed my thoughts and feelings with respect to what I want to do, and have ascertained that saying what I need to say is more important to me at the moment than either playing the piano or reading are. It is writing that I really want to do.

As mistress of my acts, I am also in control of the kind of string of words that I am typing. I could string words together differently. I could choose ugly words for my string. I could choose rare words for this string. I could use difficult syntax for my string. I could not follow grammatical rules in my string. If one seeks a reason for my putting together this present string of words in the way in which I am doing so, one need go no farther than me. How I act is “in my power.” As this is so, the value of my acts is “in my power:” their aesthetic value, and their moral value. If this string of words is ugly, incoherent, or ill formed, it is my responsibility. “An act,” Aquinas again claims succinctly, “is imputed to an agent when it is in his power, so that he has dominion over it.”<sup>37</sup>

The point is that we all know by experience that the heart of our responsibility for our intentional acts lies in the fact that it is we who must determine *that*, *what*, and *how* they will be. Here is the problem. Determining that we will act, what we will do, and how we will do what we

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<sup>36</sup> See, e.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 1, a.1 c.: “Of actions done by man those alone are properly called ‘human,’ which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as ‘the faculty and will of reason.’ Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.”

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 21, a. 2 c.: “an action is said to deserve praise or blame, from its being imputed to the agent: since to praise or to blame means nothing else than to impute to someone the malice or goodness of his action. Now an action is imputed to an agent, when it is in his power, so that he has dominion over it: because it is through his will that man has dominion over his actions, as was made clear above.”

do seems necessarily to presuppose that there are different ways in which we could act. What could determining our actions be, if we did not have different ways in which we could act, different possible courses of action? It would apparently be something like deliberating about necessary events, which Aristotle claims is impossible. No, just as we can only deliberate about those actions that are not necessary, so too, it would seem, can we only determine to perform those actions that we do not necessarily perform, those actions that we do not necessarily perform in a specific way. But actions that we do not necessarily perform are actions that we only possibly perform. And whenever it is only possible for us to perform a given act, it is also possible for us not to perform it. Aristotle makes this point very clearly: “when acting is up to us, so is not acting, and when no is up to us, so is yes” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 5, 1113<sup>b</sup>, 8).<sup>38</sup> And just as determining to act *per se* seems necessarily to presuppose that we could have not acted, determining to perform a specific kind of act seems necessarily to presuppose that we could have not performed that kind of act: that we could have performed a different kind of act. And again, just as determining to act *per se* seems to presuppose that we need not have acted, determining to act in a specific way seems to presuppose that we need not have acted in that way. To be precise, determining to act aesthetically and morally seems necessarily to presuppose that we need not have acted aesthetically or morally. That we could have acted in an ugly and immoral way. Aristotle also makes this point very clearly.

And so if acting, when it is fine, is up to us, not acting, when it is shameful, is also up to us; and if not acting, when it is fine, is up to us, then acting, when it is shameful is also up to us (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 5, 1113<sup>b</sup>, 9–11).<sup>39</sup>

It is precisely because determining to act *per se* seems necessarily to presuppose that we have different possible courses of action that determining both that and how we will act seems necessarily to involve choice.<sup>40</sup> When one’s possible courses of action are many, choice is the difference between acting and not acting. When the kinds of action one can perform are many, it is again choice that determines what one will do. When the ways in which one can perform an action are many, it is choice that determines how one will act. Choice is the difference between an actual act and a possible one. It is the difference between an aesthetic and an unaesthetic act, between a moral act and an immoral one. Choice, it would seem as such, is the root of our responsibility for both our acts and their aesthetic and moral value.

Now, freedom is what we call that power, that capacity, that feature of ours that makes us responsible for our acts. It is that feature that enables us to be “masters of our acts.” If we can only be masters of those acts for which we determine *that* they are, *what* they are, and *how* they are, and if determining itself presupposes both that we have different ways in which we could

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<sup>38</sup> See, on this point e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 13, a. 5 c. “our choice is always concerned with our actions. Now whatever is done by us, is possible to us. Therefore we must needs say that choice is only of possible things.”

<sup>39</sup> I am using Terence Irwin’s translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company (1999), 37.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 83, a. 3 c.: “The proper act of free-will is choice: for we say that we have a free-will because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to choose.”



act—different possible courses of action—and that we choose to act, then both different possible courses of action and choice, it would seem, are necessary features of freedom.

If this is so, then maintaining uprightness for the sake of this uprightness, it would seem, can play no part in a definition of freedom. To be sure, maintaining uprightness for its own sake can be something to which free beings aspire. Would that everyone were to do so. But if maintaining uprightness for its own sake were a part of the definition of freedom, then neither having different possible courses of action, nor choice, could be necessary features of freedom. And this would seem absurd.<sup>41</sup> It would seem flatly to contradict our experience. What is more, if maintaining uprightness for its own sake were a necessary feature of freedom, then, it would seem, the morality of no act could be determined by an agent. Determining, it would seem, requires alternatives, alternatives which maintaining uprightness for the sake of this uprightness does not afford. But claiming that the morality of no act can be determined by an agent does not just sound absurd. It would seem to strip us of our responsibility for our actions and their morality. It would empty our actions of that which makes them ours. Freedom, it would therefore seem, cannot be *rectitudo*.

Why, then, bother to discuss Saint Anselm's definition of freedom at all? Why discuss a definition that can apparently be so easily dismissed? Why talk about a dangerous definition? Why, in one's introductory remarks, go so far as to claim that that definition is a gem? These questions are certainly legitimate. They (and other questions like them) seem also to have convinced many people not even to acquaint themselves with Anselm's definition of freedom.

## Freedom and Truth

Neither the objections nor the harsh dismissal would have bothered Saint Anselm in the slightest. Nor would they have changed his mind with respect to the nature of freedom. Both suffer from the very defect that he tried to correct in his trilogy of works concerning truth, freedom, and the origin of evil: *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli*. Both stem from what Anselm argued was a distorted conception of freedom.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf., e.g., Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, q. 6 where Aquinas argues that choice is indeed a necessary condition of freedom. The argument has direct bearing on Anselm's: "But if we consider the movement of the will on the part of the object determining the act of will to will this or that, we must take into consideration that the object moving the will is a good apprehended as befitting. Hence if some good is proposed that is apprehended as having the aspect of good but not as befitting, it will not move the will. But since deliberations and choices are about particular things, in regard to which we act, it is required that what is apprehended as good and befitting be apprehended as good and befitting in particular and not merely in general. If then something is apprehended as a befitting good according to all the particular aspects that can be considered, it will move the will necessarily, and for this reason of necessity man desires happiness, which according to Boethius is a 'state made perfect by the simultaneous possession of all good things.' And I say 'of necessity' so far as concerns the exercise of the act, because he cannot will the opposite, but not so far as concerns the exercise of the act, because a person at that time may not will the thing of happiness, since even the very acts of the intellect and the will are particular acts." I am using the Oesterle translation. St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, Notre Dame (In.) University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

There are many reasons why Anselm held that the claim that both choice and alternate possible courses of action are necessary characteristics of freedom is distorted. The most basic is that this claim mistakes *possible* features of free acts both for *necessary* features of free acts and for *necessary* features of freedom itself. It mistakes features of *some* free acts for both features of *all* free acts, and of freedom itself. Above all, it mistakes features of the *conditioned* for features of its *condition*.

Anselm did not doubt that free actions must originate (and not by necessity) in a rational agent who controls his acts.<sup>42</sup> Nor did he doubt that they *could* involve choice between alternate possible courses of action. Evil, he was convinced, would be inexplicable if free actions did not both originate in created rational agents,<sup>43</sup> and involve choice between alternate courses of action.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Anselm held that to claim that choice and alternate possible courses of

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<sup>42</sup> Cf., e.g., *De Libertate Arbitrii*, V: “a man can be bound against his will, because he can be bound when he is unwilling to be bound; a man can be tortured against his will, because he can be tortured when he is unwilling to be tortured; a man can be killed against his will, because he can be killed when he is unwilling to be killed. But a man cannot will against his will, because he cannot will if he is unwilling to will. For everyone-who-wills wills that he will.”

<sup>43</sup> The object of the first three chapters of the *De Casu Diaboli* is precisely to demonstrate that those free actions that result in evil must originate in the agent himself. The alternative, as far as Anselm is concerned, is that they originate in God. Anselm considers this possibility absurd. See *De Casu Diaboli*, 3: “the reason [the Devil] did not will when and what he ought to have willed is not that his will had a deficiency which resulted from God's failure to give; rather, [he did not will when and what he ought to have willed] because by willing what he ought *not* to have willed, he expelled his good will in consequence of a supervening evil will. Accordingly, it is not the case that he did not have, or did not receive, a good persevering will because God did not give it; rather, God did not give it because he deserted it by willing what he ought not to have willed; and by deserting it he did not keep it.” See also *De Casu Diaboli*, 12–14.

<sup>44</sup> The object of chapters 12–14 of the *De Casu Diaboli* is to explain how the first evil action came to be. In Anselm's account, it necessarily involved the choice between happiness and justice. His main reason for making this claim is that had choice not been involved in the initial willing of both those angels who did fall and those who did not, angels would have willed what they willed by necessity. Had this been so, they could not have therefore been held responsible for what they actually did will. It is only if the devil had a choice, Anselm claims, that he could be held responsible for his sinning. So too could the angels who did not fall not truly be said to will *rectitudo* for the sake of *rectitudo*—and thus will rightly—if they had not had a choice between willing happiness or justice. See *De Casu Diaboli*, 14: “Then, since [Satan] cannot be called just or unjust merely because he wills happiness or merely because he wills what is fitting (for he would will these of necessity), and since he neither can nor ought to be happy unless he wills to be happy and wills justly, it is necessary for God to make both wills so agree in him that he wills to be happy and wills justly. Accordingly, the addition of justice would so temper the will-for-happiness that its excesses would be checked while its power to transgress would remain unabridged. Thus, although with respect to the fact that he would will to be happy he would be able to exceed the mean, nevertheless with respect to the fact that he would will justly he would not will to exceed the mean. And so, thus possessing a just will-for-happiness he could and should be happy. And by not willing what he ought not to will, although able [to will it], he would merit never to be able to will what he ought not to will. And by always keeping justice by means of a tempered will, he would in no way experience need. But if he were to desert justice by means of an immoderate will, he would in every way experience need.” See also, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, 2: “The apostate angel [Satan] and the first man [Adam] sinned by free choice, for [each] sinned by his own choice, which was so free that it could not be compelled by any other thing to sin. Therefore, [each of them] is justly blamed because in spite of having this freedom of choice, each sinned freely and out of no necessity and without being compelled by anything else.” See also on this point, Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, “Anselm's Account of Freedom,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, pp. 179–203.

action are *necessary* features of freedom—that no act can be free if it does not involve the choice between alternate possible courses of action—is dangerously false.

The falseness of this claim can perhaps be made most evident if one compares it to a parallel claim with respect to truth: that two necessary features of truth are that it is a necessary condition of the possibility of intellectual error, and a necessary condition of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind.

Truth can certainly be both things. It is clearly a necessary condition of the possibility of intellectual error. If there were no such thing as truth, no one could hold a false belief. Without truth, no belief could be false! This means that if there were no such thing as truth, no one would be capable of intellectual error. False beliefs result from intellectual error after all. Thus, truth is a necessary condition of the possibility of intellectual error. Truth is equally clearly a necessary condition of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind. As well as being a necessary condition of intellectual error, truth is also a necessary condition of the possibility of knowledge. Just as no being could hold false beliefs if there were no truth, so too could no being hold true beliefs if there were no truth. It is only if there is truth, as such, that the fallible mind can either know true beliefs, or hold false ones. But knowing true beliefs and holding false ones are alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind. If there is truth, a person with a fallible mind who sets out to understand a given thing can either form a true belief about that thing, or he can form a false one. He has cognitive alternatives. Thus, if there is truth, the fallible mind has alternate cognitive possibilities, which is to say that truth is a necessary condition of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind.

The fact that the truth is a necessary condition both of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind does not, however, entail that the truth is *necessarily* a necessary condition of both things. It does not entail that being a necessary condition both of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities is a *necessary* feature of truth. It does not entail that being a necessary condition both of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities is a part of the very definition of truth. The very thought that these features could be a part of the definition of truth is simply ridiculous. This is not just because the claim that the truth is a necessary condition both of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities mistakes a possible feature for a necessary one. The claim is inherently ridiculous. If being a necessary condition of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind were a necessary feature of truth, then intellectual fallibility itself would be a necessary condition of truth, *quod dictu nefas*! That is, if being a necessary condition of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities for the fallible mind were a necessary feature of truth, nothing could be true if it both could not be misunderstood, and were not to allow for different and contradictory interpretations. But it is simply and obviously ridiculous to hold nothing can be true unless it can be misunderstood, and unless it allows for different and contradictory interpretations. It is also absurd to claim that intellectual fallibility is a necessary condition of truth.

So too, in Anselm's view, is it for freedom. Freedom, he held, is certainly a necessary condition of the possibility of spontaneity. No being could have the capacity to originate a non-necessary act of which he is in control, if he were not free. It is also clear that just as truth is a necessary condition of the mind's having alternate cognitive possibilities, so too is freedom a necessary condition of the will's having alternate possible courses of action. After all, if freedom is a necessary condition of a being's having the capacity to originate a non-necessary act that he controls, it must also be a condition of his having the capacity not to originate that act. The act is both non-necessary and in the agent's control, after all. As this is so, freedom is certainly a necessary condition of the will's having alternate possible courses of action. As the necessary condition of alternate possibilities for the will, freedom must also be necessary condition of choice. Alternative possible courses of action are themselves a necessary condition of choice. Thus, if freedom is a necessary condition of alternate possible courses of action for the will, so too must it be a necessary condition of choice. But freedom's being a necessary condition of both alternate possible courses of action for the will and choice does not entail that freedom is *necessarily* either one of these things. It does not entail that being a necessary condition of both alternate possible courses of action for the will and choice is a necessary characteristic of freedom. As is true of the claim that being the necessary condition both of intellectual error and of alternate cognitive possibilities is a *necessary* feature of truth, the claim that being the necessary condition both of choice and of alternate possibilities for the will is a *necessary* feature of freedom mistakes a *possible* feature with a necessary one. The claim also mistakes necessary features of the *conditioned* for necessary features of its *condition*. The fact that I am a necessary condition of my nieces and nephews having an aunt does not entail that I must be their aunt, that it is not possible for me not to be their aunt, that being their aunt is one of my necessary characteristics. Surely, my being their aunt depends on more than just me! So too is it with the claim that alternate possible courses of action and choice are necessary features of freedom. The fact that freedom is a necessary condition of choice and alternate possibilities does not entail that alternate possibilities and choice are necessary features of freedom.

What is more, just as the claim that being the necessary condition of both intellectual error and alternate cognitive possibilities for the mind are necessary features of truth would make intellectual fallibility a necessary feature of truth, the claim that being a necessary condition of both choice and alternate possibilities for the will are necessary features of freedom would make fallibility of the will a necessary characteristic of freedom. And just as the claim that fallibility is a necessary feature of truth is absurd, so too is it absurd to claim that fallibility of the will is a necessary feature of freedom. It would entail that no perfect being can be free. *Quod dictu nefas!*

## **Freedom and Evil**

This last point is what most concerned Anselm with respect to freedom. It is clear from his response to the opening question of the *De Libertate Arbitrii*:

I do not think that freedom of choice is the ability to sin and not to sin. Indeed, if this were its definition, then neither God nor the angels who are not able to sin would have free choice—a blasphemous thing to say (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 1).

What does sinning have to do with the claim that choice and alternate possibilities are necessary characteristics of freedom? An example might perhaps be helpful here. Let us take the case of the good Samaritan. The good Samaritan was traveling for business reasons, one supposes, from Jerusalem to Jericho and came across a man who had been attacked by brigands. The man was most likely bleeding. He might have had broken bones. What is certain is that he was on death's door, that he had no money, and that he had been on the road long enough for two people to have passed him and done nothing to help him. Now, let us assume that the good Samaritan had alternate possible courses of action when he came upon the wounded man. Let us also assume that he had a choice with respect to what to do with the wounded man. What would the good Samaritan's alternatives have been? What would his possible choices have been? The answer, it seems, is simple. The possible courses of action between which the good Samaritan could have chosen are two. The good Samaritan could either have: (a) helped the dying man stranded on the road; or he could (b) not have helped the dying man.

There is something important about these alternatives. Aside from being alternate possible courses of action between which to choose, the good Samaritan's alternatives are also moral alternatives. Whether one wants to use Kant's definition of a moral act, or Aristotle's, Aquinas's or Anselm's, it is clear that the good Samaritan's first alternative—(a) to help the dying man—conforms with what is morally good and right. To help the dying man is the right thing to do. It is what a good person would do. The second alternative—(b) not to help the dying man—on the other hand, does not just not conform with what is morally good or right. It is not a morally indifferent act: an act which is neither morally good nor evil, neither right nor wrong. (b) Not helping a dying man contradicts what is morally good and right. It is positively wrong not to help a dying man when you are traveling on the road to Jericho. Thus, if the good Samaritan did indeed have a choice between alternate possible courses of action, his choice was not just a choice between different possible actions. It was a choice between what is right and what is wrong, between good and evil, between being upright and sinning.

The case of the good Samaritan illustrates what Anselm considered a crucial characteristic of alternate possible courses of action: they can be moral alternatives as well as volitional alternatives. Being able to do or not do a given thing need not just be a matter of the will's having alternate possible courses of action. It can also be a matter of the will's adhering to what is right, or choosing what is wrong. It can be a matter of doing good or doing evil. If this is so, then to claim that having alternate courses of action is a necessary characteristic of freedom is to claim that having moral alternatives is also a necessary characteristic of freedom. But to claim that having moral alternatives is a necessary condition of freedom is to claim that whosoever is free must be able to do both what is moral or what is immoral; that he must be able to do what is good just as he must be able to do what is evil. To claim that having moral alternatives is a necessary condition of freedom is to claim that it must be possible for every free being insofar as

he is free to do something evil, something immoral. It is to claim that freedom itself must always include the possibility of immorality, of evil.

This is precisely the claim that Anselm finds abhorrent. If every free being must be capable of doing something evil—something immoral—Anselm reasoned, then God and the angels, who are certainly rational agents, must either be capable of doing something evil or immoral, or they must not be free. But neither possibility is remotely acceptable. Anselm immediately rejected the second of these in his response to the opening question of the *De Libertate Arbitrii*:

I do not think that freedom of choice is the ability to sin and not to sin. Indeed, if this were its definition, then neither God nor the angels who are not able to sin would have free choice—a blasphemous thing to say (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 1).

He rejected the first possibility shortly after having rejected the second:

it is necessary to give such a definition of “freedom of choice”—a definition which contains neither more nor less than freedom does. Therefore, since the free choice of God and of the good angels is not able to sin, “to be able to sin” does not pertain to the definition of “freedom of choice. In fact, the ability to sin does not constitute either freedom or a part of freedom.” (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, 1).

Anselm’s conclusion is embedded in his rejection of both possible consequents of the claim that being free entails that one is capable of doing something evil: “freedom of choice is not the ability to sin and not sin.”

If having moral alternatives cannot be a necessary condition of being free (if it cannot be a necessary feature of freedom), then neither can having alternate possible courses of action be a necessary condition of being free. Some volitional alternatives are moral alternatives, and there are some beings who do not have moral alternatives.<sup>45</sup> And as having alternate possible courses of action cannot be a necessary condition of being free, so too is it not possible for choice to be a necessary condition of being free. One cannot have choices if one does not have alternate possible courses of action.

The point here is a crucial one.

(1) if *alternate possible courses of action* and choice were necessary conditions of freedom, then no free being insofar as he is free could have a right course of

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<sup>45</sup> Anselm thought it obvious that a perfect free being, insofar as he is perfect, cannot do what is evil. The perfect being, he held, is a good being, and the good makes “all other things to be something and in some respect to fare well” (*Monologion*, 1). See on this point my “Saint Anselm and the Problem of Evil, or on Freeing Evil from the Problem of Evil” for *Essays on Saint Anselm On the Occasion of the 900th Anniversary of his Death*, eds. Ralph MacInerney and John Fortin OSB, in press.

action, which he knows to be the right course of action, and which he can unerringly follow.

For the moment in which a free being could insofar as he is free have a right course of action, which he knows to be the right action, and which he can unerringly follow, that being would not truly have *alternate possible courses of action*. He could not truly choose between different courses of action. Consequently, if *alternate possible courses of action* and choice were constituent of freedom, that free being would not be free. But:

(2) it is absurd to claim that no free being can insofar as he is free have a right course of action, which he knows to be the right action, and which he can unerringly follow.

To claim that “no free being insofar as he is free can have a right course of action, which he knows to be the right course of action, and which he can unerringly follow” is to deny the possibility of there being a *perfect* free being. For a perfect free being would in every instance know the right action, and he would necessarily be able unerringly to follow the right course of action. It is absurd to deny the possibility of there being a *perfect* free being. Consequently,

(3) *alternate possible courses of action* and choice are not constituent of freedom.

## Conclusion

There are many things to be said about Anselm’s argument. The argument indicates that one of the presuppositions of the claim that alternate possible courses of action and choice are necessary features of freedom is that no volitional alternatives are moral alternatives. It indicates that the claim that choice and alternate possible courses of action are necessary requisites of freedom presupposes that there can be no such thing as a perfect free being. The argument indicates that unlike our definitions of truth, those definitions of freedom which claim that alternate possible courses of action and choice do not define freedom through a perfect instance of freedom: the freedom of a perfect rational being. They define it through an imperfect one: the freedom of imperfect rational beings. There is good reason to discuss all of these points. The problem is that there is no time to do so now.

I began this lecture with a question: does one need to have alternate possible courses of action in order to be free? The interpretation of the question to which I wanted to respond is: is indifference with respect to what one does necessary to freedom? Must we genuinely be ready to take either one of two possible courses of action in order to be free? Saint Anselm’s definition of freedom gives us good reason to believe that we need not to. There are very good reasons for believing that he is right. Were he not, it would be impossible for a perfect community of perfect free beings to exist, and that is a fate none of us should be willing to accept.